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"On the Square"

THE HISTORY

OF A

CONVERT

By JOHN TIMOTHY STONE, D.D.

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LAYMEN'S MISSIONARY MOVEMENT
1 Madison Avenue
New York

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"ON THE SQUARE"—THE HISTORY OF A CONVERT.

BY JOHN TIMOTHY STONE.

"Believe in foreign missions? Of course I don't. In the first place, what right have you, or any other man, to force your particular religious belief on people that are satisfied and have a right to their own?"

I was inclined to get angry and answer with a bit of sarcasm, but I did not. We were old classmates, and I knew him to be sensible and "on the square." I also knew that he was not open to conviction in his present frame of mind, so we spent half an hour in talking of current news and problems. As I started to go, he urged me back into my chair with the remark: "Sit down, you good-natured old visionary. So you think it is useless to talk to me on your pet subject of missions, do you?"

His keen insight had told him the real truth, and he could read me like a book. Before I could answer, he went on:

"You think I am not open to conviction, don't you? Well, old fellow, I hope that isn't true, but at the same time, for the life of me, I cannot see what has got you so interested in the God-forsaken heathen. Aren't there foreigners enough right here in our city who need Christianity, to say nothing of civilization? You church people strike me every year for subscriptions to the charity organization, the playgrounds, the kindergartens, the fresh air work, the public baths, to say nothing of helping a dozen orphan asylums and hospitals, concert and fair tickets thrown in. I am willing to do what I can, but why send a lot of well-educated chaps and helpless women over to China and India?"

"Well, I am not going into that to-night," I replied, reaching for my hat and cane, "but if you want to

talk it out some evening, I am your man. Only let me ask you to think about one thing: You are trying to build up a business. You are doing new business each year. You are sending your men all over the East and South, into the West and Northwest, and you told me the other day that you were going to send over to England and to the Continent. You even volunteered that you were thinking seriously of catering to the Eastern trade and establishing agencies in China, Japan and the Philippines. I want to ask you a question: Why not stick to this city and this country with your business? They aren't anxious for your goods over there. *You* are pushing it. They are not. Think the thing over, old man. Good-night."

"Hold on," he said; "you don't realize that I am putting out the best article."

"Yes, I do; but how about our article?"

Soon came this characteristic letter from my old college chum:

"Come around to the house again, old fellow. That last undercut you gave me floored me. I am ready to talk Hongkong, Bangkok, Africa, Madagascar and New Zealand, all at the same time, and after you get in your innings, I want to talk with you a bit more as to my own business.

* * * * *

The weeks lengthened into months and it was almost a year before we sat down again before his open fireplace. It had been a time of growth. Already he had introduced his goods into England and Germany, and had made arrangements for opening offices in the Far East. He was filled with his subject, and talked an hour before we brought up missions. Finally I said:

"Jack, you are in business to make the thing go. You have told me more than once that you wanted to retire before you were 60, and you intended 'to have

a roll.' 'More business means more money,' is your motto.

"Well, old man, I am in business, too, but I am in business for another Man, and I am after more business and money to make that business go, and my Master has told me to push it into the whole world. If you will pull down your old Bible, I will show you my orders."

I turned to Matthew 28:19, 20, and read: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

"Now, Jack, you know well enough I am no saint, but I am trying to obey orders and write new business, according to that command. Of course, ambitious and worldly men do not see it in that light. In fact, you know it's always a hard thing 'to see the truths that cross our inclination.' "

Just then we were interrupted by little Jack, aged five, whose footsteps were followed by the pit-a-pat of his little two-year-old sister trudging behind. "Night, night, dada," said wee Dorothy, and as he caught up each child for the good-night kiss I thought I had never known a happier home or seen a lovelier fireside. A moment more and a gentle voice called, "Come, children, you are very late to-night," but hearing me, the mother came in quickly and made me feel more at home than ever. "You see, I am nurse to-night, and these little children have been imposing on my good nature to stay up late." As they climbed the stairs baby wanted her last word, and called back, "God bless you, dada," which meant another kiss and another roguish laugh from the older brother as he jumped out at his father from behind the hall door.

"Confound it, Bill" (for this was my familiar name

with my old friend), "don't you think it is tough to tackle a proposition like this one we've started on to-night, after such a picture as that we have just had?"

If I had wanted to make a story-book impression I might have answered by drawing another picture of a heathen home, and leaving the comparison, but I was not after a temporary impression. I wanted Jack to believe in the thing, for I knew that his kind does not jump at conclusions, but that conviction meant conversion, and conversion action and accomplishment.

Well, we had it out. He didn't give me time to open up with my well-planned introduction, but shot off on his own line:

"Bill, I might as well be honest. Take those words of Christ, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel.' I am not in the same class with the men the Master addressed those words to; neither is the world, nor present-day Christianity. Those disciples and apostles of Christ were following a new leader. They had given up everything to him. They had forsaken home and friends, swung away from religious custom and creed, and were carried away with the magnetism of this new Man and his cause. I do not believe that command, 'Go ye into all the world,' holds to-day, nor with our class. He gave that command to them, and many of them obeyed it, but you can't take the Bible as a whole literally. God sent poor Jonah to Nineveh on a mission, and he finally went. That doesn't mean that you and I are to go to Nineveh. The other night I read about Philip. God sent him down to talk with that African in the desert, but he doesn't send me, or doesn't send you, even if you are a minister."

I was about to break in, but he held the floor.

"You take the Scripture too literally for me, and

yet I am not at all in sympathy with this modern craze in searching for the mistakes of Moses rather than his accomplishments. I am grateful that my faith in the Bible as the word of God is unshaken, but I do not hold that we are to make ourselves uncomfortable because we cannot literally carry out its every exact precept and command to-day. It *is* true that there are heathen enough here in our own city. Why not pull the weeds out of our own gardens and sow them properly before we start in on the gardens thousands of miles away? Example is a more powerful argument than rhetoric. I do not blame you for your zeal. I suppose you were trained to believe and preach missions when you studied theology, and I do not mind hearing you preach them once in a while. In fact, you usually seem to get warmed up to your best then, but I am honest enough to say I am not with you on the deal. I will help you with your home missionary work, especially civic righteousness."

It is a great privilege for a minister to have a classmate in his parish who is in the thick of the business world, especially a man who will sit down in front of his own open fire and talk things over candidly. I knew my friend was not only honest but liberal. He was, in fact, a Christian gentleman in every accepted definition of the word. He did not belong to the oft-quoted class who, failing to believe in foreign missions, never give anything to home or city missions. It is not true that the man who believes in the one and not in the other, never gives to either. Scores of men whom we all know, are like this man—liberal, kind, considerate, but uninformed and unconvinced.

* * * * *

It was my turn now, and he, open-minded fellow that he really was, awaited my reply. "I know we cannot literalize too exactly, Jack, but whom did Christ come to save, your home and mine, or the

homes of the world? What is Christianity, if it is not a big thing? Whoever accomplished anything who did not expect and work for great things? You spoke once of the God-forsaken heathen.' Are they God-forsaken or man-forsaken? God has done his part; have we done ours? You believe Christ was and is the Son of God? That verse we read in Matthew was addressed to men, not simply to disciples, but men of to-day as well as yesterday. 'Go ye into all the world.' Have we done it?

"Suppose Paul had not done his part, and had not left Asia for Europe when the word came, 'Come over into Macedonia and help us.' There was plenty of work begun and partially organized in Asia Minor. Those cities loved him and followed him, but a greater need and broader opportunity demanded his leadership. Would Europe have known Christianity had he not laid the roadbed through that heathen continent, as it was then—a track over which the great trains of civilization afterwards sped? How about our ancestors? You cannot find a worse heathen than the Anglo-Saxon, if you go back far enough. Is Christianity to-day following out Christ's teaching as to evangelization, or have we turned it into a comfortable Christianity of our own? Are Christian men to-day putting the same energy and thought into God's work along lines of advancement which they are putting into their own business?

"We have talked pretty nearly an hour to-night as to what you have been doing the last year in business. It has not been local or even national work either, and you are not satisfied with Europe, but are already about to introduce your goods into China, Japan and the Philippines. It is all right. Why shouldn't you do it? It is just this enterprise that is making you successful; but it seems to me that God wants us to write new business for him. He is the Head of our

firm. He says 'Go.' 'Do something!' We may not be able to count all costs, expenses, results, but he does the office work, and will settle up the accounts and will be responsible for results. He is the Manager, the Owner. We have our orders."

* * * * *

Just then the telephone rang. It was a message from my wife telling of a sad accident in the parish—a poor fellow who had been crushed in an elevator. His oldest boy was waiting at the manse for me.

Jack was touched. He knew the man, and said: "I met him on my way home to-night. What a reality life is, and death too! My! I wish I could comfort that poor wife and children. Call on me, if I can help."

As he helped me on with my coat, he said: "We haven't talked this thing out yet. We must have another evening. I will come over to the manse some night next week, if you say so."

As I left him he agreed to look up Romans 10:13-15: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach unless they be sent?"

* * * * *

We did not meet the next week. Every night was filled, and the week after, Jack was called West on business. Then his children were ill, and over a month went by.

I was returning from New York on the Congressional Limited, and walking through the car, found him reading a book. "Well, old man, what is your book?" I inquired, but before he replied I asked again, "Where did you get hold of this? This is one of my pet volumes," for I was surprised to see in his hands "A Life for Africa," that familiar and fascinat-

ing biography of Adolphus C. Good, the missionary hero in our West African mission. He did not answer, but we both joined in a good laugh.

"Don't fool yourself, I am not convinced," he said. "I am only priming up to lay you out."

"Well, I am not afraid of your ammunition. Where did you get hold of this book, anyway?"

Then he told me that "missions" had about bored him to death lately, and he had stumbled across them everywhere. A night or two after our talk a letter had come from a college mate in Colombo telling him of his experiences in Ceylon. It seems the fellow had gone on a business trip into the Far East, and had been spending a few weeks in that interesting city. He had attended a meeting of college students (invited by a friend), and had found those Indian students organized into a Young Men's Christian Association. One of the international secretaries addressed them with great power. The letter went on to tell of the wonderful work they were accomplishing there, establishing the Christian faith among those fellows, many of whom had lost their belief and the faith of their fathers, and were agnostics and infidels.

Then he told me of an experience he had in a Western city when dining with a friend. As they were smoking after dinner he saw a book on the library table, and upon taking it up, his friend waxed eloquent in its praise. It was "The Tragedy of Paoting-fu" by Ketler. "Talk about heroism!" This Western man told every man in the group to get that book and read it. Jack had, and now went into a thrilling testimony of men like Hodge, Pitkin and Simcox.

* * * * *

I began to think Jack was talking missions instead of myself. I hadn't had a chance to get a word in edgewise. We had gone through Trenton, and he, marvelous to relate, had apparently failed to notice

the newsboy who had gone through calling the Philadelphia evening papers.

"A day or two after that," he continued, "I met a man from Montclair who tackled me on our local church work, and asked me what led to our large missionary interest. I told him he had the wrong man, that I wasn't posted and hadn't much stock in foreign missions. He told me of this man 'Good,' who went out under their board, and asked me if I had ever heard of him. A day or two ago he sent me this book which you just caught me reading, and as courtesy demanded my looking it over, I tucked it into my grip—and to tell the truth, I am glad of it. This fellow was a rare article. He was the real thing. Do you know that this man 'Good' was one of the first naturalists of our day?"

He took the book from me, and turned to the last page's description of Good's discoveries and gifts to science. "And to think that fellow died so young!"

"Well, Bill, I have been catching missions everywhere. My wife says I will be going to China next myself, but I got it back on her, for I had to call her down the other night for reading so late upon that Paoting-fu tale."

* * * * *

He stopped long enough to take breath, and I asked: "Did you read the verse in Romans?"

"Read it? Yes, more than once. I got interested in the book, and went through it to find out how he happened to say it. I got interested in Galatians too, and those verses over in the sixth chapter on 'Bear ye one another's burdens' and 'Every man shall bear his own burden' struck me. I believe if the church had a little more burden-bearing to do, it might bear its owns burdens a little better. This fellow whom I met from Montclair told me that their church had never had a bit of trouble with finances since they got inter-

ested in the mission field. It strikes me some of us apparently have been using homeopathy too much in missions."

As he left me at West Philadelphia he shouted back: "I read another good book called 'Pastor Hsi, one of China's Scholars,' by Geraldine Guinness Taylor. I'll send you a copy." I did not have a chance to tell him that it was one of my pet volumes, but when he had gone I fell to thinking. After all, what an embodiment this friend was to me of what I had always believed—that this lack of interest in missionary work is not due to opposition but to ignorance! If the opposer once becomes thoroughly instructed, home and foreign missions need neither apology nor defense. They speak for themselves.

One evening I went down to the University Club to hear a man from China. It was a bright lecture, offhand and suggestive. The speaker knew the East and present-day problems. He was fair-minded and frank. He exploded the theory that the Boxer uprising was due to missionaries and Christianity, attributing it to economic changes occasioned by modern transportation and modern mechanical devices. He showed graphically how men who had been employed for generations to carry goods on wheelbarrows would naturally be thrown out of employment when the freight train took their place. He praised missionaries for advancing moral and civilizing standards.

Later on I ran into Jack in the refreshment room defending the lecturer and missionaries in general, before three or four opposers.

As I approached he changed the subject, but one of the group saw his chance for a joke, and told me he had just met my "new assistant." Jack winked instead of wincing, and asked his friend if he had paid his pew rent recently. The spark caught fire, and we scattered. I learned afterward that Jack sent

his jocose friend a copy of Jacob Riis's book "The Peril and Preservation of the Home," with the following passage underscored:

"Every once in a while I hear some one growl against foreign missions because the money and strength put into them are needed at home. I did it myself when I did not know better. God forgive me! I know better now; and I will tell you how I found out. I became interested in a strong religious awakening in my old city of Copenhagen, and set about investigating it. It was then that I learned what others have learned before me, and that was the fact there, that for every dollar you gave away to convert the heathen abroad, God gives you ten dollars' worth of purpose to deal with your heathen at home."

As I waited in the check room for my hat my "new assistant" touched me on the shoulder and asked if I was going to walk up. He wanted to talk to me about the opening verses in Acts. He said that these verses had gotten him interested in the entire book, and that he had been trying to relate them to some things that were going on to-day.

"The word 'power' has gotten hold of me. 'Ye shall receive power.' We have men enough, money enough and influence enough, but we lack 'power.' Everybody is after power to-day, whether you want a public speaker or an automobile; but somehow we do not get it in the church. I do not know that I ever heard any of you ministers preach on 'The Power of God's Spirit.' Why don't you preach on it? That's just what the church needs. She lacks power."

I told him I had preached on that very verse the year before. "Well, I had forgotten it, or probably did not hear it," he replied. (He had become a regular attendant within a year.) "That verse is the root of it all," he said; then he went on to outline practically about what I had said in my sermon. He had

not learned it from me. We had both been taught by the same Great Teacher.

That night when I knelt alone, I thanked God for this new sympathy and help which had come from the best ranks of all—the strong ranks of Christian business men.

* * * * *

Months passed. Business depressions had been putting wrinkles into the faces of smooth-browed, clear-headed merchants and financial leaders. Frequently my study morning had been interrupted by some earnest, anxious friend who was fighting it out in the dark and alone. The little office in the manse had often been turned into a prayer meeting room, when only three were present—two men and the Son of God.

One morning my secretary told me that "Mr. Blank" wanted to see me "personally." No card had been sent up.

It was Jack. I had been irritated all the morning by constant interruptions, but my irritation vanished, for I know his busy life and knew his morning errand must be serious. I knew it was not business depression this time. He had been a saving-stroke during these trying days, and had rescued many a struggling swimmer. It was deeper down than business trouble. His face told me that as I took his hand.

"Are they ill at home?" I asked.

"Yes, Bill, little Jack is a sick boy." His voice broke. "They are having a consultation now. We have a good nurse, but come over to the house. It is mighty hard on the little wife. She was down at Atlantic City, and came back last night. We hoped he was better or I would have sent for you sooner, but I knew how much you had on you. I hated to disturb you in your morning's work. It is some internal trouble setting in after a bad cold. The little

fellow told me this morning that he wanted to see you, but I doubt if they will let you see him. Come over anyway. The prayer will help the mother."

It was the same story of the sickroom, and the personal side we must omit. My heart was full, but faith made me hopeful. We walked arm in arm to the home. Our hearts spoke, but our lips said nothing. His manly spirit sought to look away from self. As we passed the fountain playing in the square he talked of the beauty of the day, and a smile hid his fear and anxiety. He stopped to shake hands with a poor invalid man who was seeking strength in the sunlight and fresh air. After a half hour's waiting the physicians came down to talk with him softly in the hall.

The boy was suffering, but wanted to see me. It was only a moment or two in his dear little room. My word of cheer was answered with his little pain-filled smile. He told me he could not go to Sunday school, but to tell his teacher he knew his verse. Down in the parlor we prayed together, that father and mother and I, the same dear old words: "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you." "Do not fear, I feel sure he will be better soon. Just trust." Words were few, but faith and hope, the "greatest of these, love," were there. They went upstairs again, and I sat waiting for Jack to return. I prayed as I would have prayed for my own little children at home. As I left Jack said with a smile: "Bill, if the boy pulls through, I will send a missionary to any country you will name." It was a brave word from a hopeful heart, but pain lay behind it.

But he did not live. Three days after, the calm, silent presence of God and the comfort of his wonderful word sustained them through that quiet service. The very fragrance of the roses and the lilies of the valley seemed to whisper the Saviour's words, when he said long ago: "Suffer the little children to

come unto me," and even now a little child was leading us. As the little mound was overlaid with the choicest of earth's fragrant gifts we came back to a home now linked eternally to that home of flowers and light, for they had given of their own. "At first we think that home is heaven, but later we think heaven is home."

* * *

But what of missions? Is it quite "on the square" to turn from an argument to a personal incident? Yes, for this reason. The head and heart are friends, and accomplishment after all is conclusive argument.

A few weeks later I found a letter on my desk, not dictated but written in a familiar hand, and it closed thus:

"I have done reasoning as to the philosophy of missions. I have learned to love them because my Master does. I have just deposited $20,000 as a memorial to our dear little Jack. May I ask you to place it permanently with our board to support a missionary, or a mission field, just as they deem wise. The interest will support a missionary, or partially support a field, on through all the years to come: yes, long generations after we are gone.

'It is more than I can well afford now, but I can work and earn more, and this will help to do little Jack's work even as if he had lived, and will live and work generations after he could have worked. This saving the world is so near our Master's heart (and my boy is now in his home), I want them to rejoice together in my money having a share in winning the poor children whom they love, who have never known Jesus Christ. God willing, some day Dorothy can have her missionary too. Meanwhile, always call on me to help.

"Your affectionate chum and convert.

"JACK."